My stay in Ghana was amazing. Ghana is a remarkable country with an abundance of potential. I learned more about myself and the world than ever before. Full of friendly people, I made connections with many wonderful Ghanaians during my stay. This is my journal documenting the sights, sounds, and smells I experienced.

**Akwaaba!/Welcome**
After delays, layovers, and flying for 15 hours, we were relieved to have landed in Kotoka International Airport. Since the airport is not equipped with terminals, when we stepped out of the aircraft we were immediately hit with the tropical heat of Accra. While in line to pass through customs, there was a power outage. This only lasted a few minutes, as the generators quickly kicked in and power was restored. Stepping out of the airport into the dark night, I smelled the musty air and glanced nervously at all the people standing just outside the airport doors yelling “Akwaaba.” As our bus drove us to the guest lodge, I looked out the window and saw chickens, goats, and women walking while balancing goods on their heads. Akwaaba is Tri for welcome. It was heard all over Accra, even announced on the intercom at the airport. I was wondering if Ghanaians are always this warm to foreigners or was it because Ghana was hosting the Africa Cup of Nations? Either way, it felt nice to have them warmly accept our presence. Were we that big of a deal? My friend Sarah was frequently pinched just to make sure she was real since being white is such an anomaly. I on the other hand was mistaken for a Japanese. When I was going through customs, the officer saw my passport and said I looked Japanese.

**Accra**
Accra is the capital of Ghana. It was very different from what I imagined it to be. Because Accra is cleaning itself up, there were paved roads for the most part, some tall buildings, and lots of construction going on. The wide gap between the rich and poor was also very obvious as there were mansions on the same street as beggars. The pace of life and work in Ghana is also notably slower than in the Western world.

**Hawkers**
On all major highways and roads you will find men, women, and children selling shirts, food, and other items. These people are known as “hawkers.” I was intrigued by the presence of hawkers. How convenient it must be to find plantain chips or other household items on the roadside. We got a craving for plantain chips and then we peered out the window of the bus and sure enough there was a plantain chip hawker eagerly trying to sell us plantain chips. I jumped to the door of the bus and the woman immediately scurried over with a basket of plantain chips gracefully perched on her head. We offered her 50 peswas for each bag of plantain chips. Other hawkers are a bit more aggressive. At the major tourist sites, we were swarmed by hawkers eagerly trying to sell us their goods. As soon as we stepped off the bus, people were pushing wood carvings, artwork, and other paraphernalia into our faces. As we entered the gates to the site, we were relieved to have ridden ourselves of the hawkers, but it didn’t stop. When we exited, the hawkers were waiting for us and followed us to the bus. They were very aggressive and
desperately wanted to complete a sale. If you said, “it’s too expensive” they would attempt to work out an agreeable price. No is not taken for an answer. In fact they even followed you from one site to another. There was one hawker who we saw us at lunch and then followed us to Mahanyia Palace.

With the constant presence of hawkers, you could conceivably get anything you need without ever leaving the bus or a Tro-Tro. I’ve sat at a red-light when a woman poked her head in front of the window and shoved toilet paper rolls, shirts, water, and plantains in my face.

**Transportation**
For the most part, we were fortunate to have an air conditioned bus to take us to the different sites. One of the buses was even equipped with a DVD player, which I found to be quite advanced. We were able to watch several movies on the long and arduous ride from Kumasi to Accra. Other forms of transportation we encountered included taxis.

The taxi system in Ghana is not as structured. For the fare, you negotiate a price before getting onto the vehicle. If the price doesn’t suit you there are plenty of other cabs who can take you to your destination. One night we wanted to go from the hotel to Chez Afrique, a local bar and restaurant. Our first driver wanted 4 cedis for each way and would not budge. The second driver agreed to our 3 cedi round trip fare. Negotiations and haggling for prices is an integral part of their bartering system.

Perhaps the most intimidating form of transportation was the Tro Tro, which we never had the opportunity to try. Tro-Tros are vans that go in a certain direction and you can ride them to your destination if it happens to be on the way. There is the driver and there is another person, the Tro-Tro mate, collecting the money. Tro-Tros are a quarter of the rate of taxis. Those Tro-Tros were packed. The cargo in the back was hanging out the trunk. I was surprised that the load didn’t fall out. To hail a Tro-Tro you hold your arm out, just like hailing a cab.

The vehicles in Ghana run on leaded gasoline. In the USA, gasoline has been unleaded for decades. The lead yielded much pollution and strong odors. It doesn’t seem to bother the people living there. I was speaking to the hotel owner’s son and he did not seem to be concerned about the lead in the gasoline. Most Ghanaians are only concerned with the rising costs of oil.

I was also shocked by the intense driving skills that Ghanaian drivers possess. Here in America, the roads are wide and we have much space between cars when driving. If we come close to the vehicle in front of us, we are accused of tailgating. In Accra, tailgating is a way of life. With all these cars on unpaved roads and no traffic lights, driving is quite an adventure, especially if you are maneuvering a bus through a tight lane bordered by gutters. Gutters are deep grooves on the edge of all roads that
are used to drain water, but because they are not covered, all the trash and waste gets dumped in there too, yielding much pollution.

There are no sidewalks anywhere in Ghana and as I walked along the streets I began to appreciate the unnecessary bursts of noise from the horn of every passing driver. The drivers are daring and anxious to steal any open space in the traffic ridden roads. Then there are pedestrians that stand still when a truck heads straight for them only to make a quick move at the last moment.

**Eating**

Most of the Ghanaian dishes we had were spicy and starchy. Their diets are composed mainly of plantains and rice. I did notice the lack of a balanced diet though. I never saw green leafy vegetables or creamy sauces. Ordinary adult staple diets consist of green plantains, cassava, manioc, sweet potatoes, and other roots with no proteins, fruit, vitamins, milk, meat or eggs, or only very rarely. Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM) is a public-health problem in developing countries such as Ghana. Another observation I made was the lack of chicken breast. We were only served dark meat (chicken wing and thighs). Furthermore those wings and thighs weren’t as wholesome or meaty as those found in the states where chickens are brought to the market in a week from hormone injections and being stuck in cages. The fish came as a whole, including bone, head, and tail. I wasn’t used to eating fish in this unprocessed state. Tipping the waiter or waitress is not customary. Because the food preparation is not as hygienic, I experienced several waves of stomachaches. These were temporary and only last a few hours. For the most part, I only consumed foods that were well cooked to prevent any instance of foodborne illnesses.

**University of Ghana**

During our time in Ghana, we took classes at the University of Ghana. We received lectures on a variety of topics ranging from colonial Ghana to the Ghanaian economy to healthcare. All were given by University of Ghana professors. The lecture style was simple, without any fancy technology or enhancements. The classroom setting was bare and minimal. We sat around in a circle. Accustomed to learning environments such as Hodson Hall, this was a big difference.

**Shopping**

During our stay, we were able to shop in a variety of settings. There was the Cultural Arts Center, gift shops, and Villages dedicated to a specific crafts such as woodcarving, kente, Adinkra, and beads.

The Cultural Arts Center is representative of a large flea market with several stalls selling everything from jewelry and clothes to wood carvings. I immediately get immersed into the endless maze of stalls in awe of all the products being sold. I have my eye on a batik. I ask the seller how much does it cost. The seller says 45 cedis. I offer 10 cedis. After some gesticulating and little movement on the price, I walk out of the stall and browse through other items. After a few minutes, the vendor walks
over and offers me a lower price. The negotiations continue to last another 10 minutes, until we finally agree on a price of 17 cedis.

Ghanaian vendors are very aggressive and want to make the sale. They sometimes get physical by dragging you in, which can be unpleasant when you aren't interested at all.

**Hygiene**
I'm told that all Ghanaians, both rich and poor, are very clean people. While driving in Accra at 6am I saw people hunched over with their bundle of straw sweeping and mopping. With the dry season in full swing, the dust being blown creates a layer of dirt on everything. The "harmattan" is a dusty wind that blows south from the Sahara during the dry season. I can attest to that since washing my hair yielded brown water, which I've never seen before. The water from the sink and shower is very minimal, almost nonexistent. Unlike in America, where we have plenty of running water that’s undergone an extensive treatment process, Ghanaians are very conservative with the water they use.

**Western Influences**
Ghana, especially Accra, is undergoing much development. I’m sure if I visit Accra again, it'll look very different. On our last day, we visited the newly built Accra Mall. As we walked through the automatic doors, we were greeted with a wave of air-conditioned air.

Built very similar to the mega malls we find in America, there were supermarkets, clothing stores, and Wal-Mart like superstores. I was even surprised to find Ben and Jerry's ice cream pints on the shelves. Quickly jumping for the ice cream, I was halted by the price tag of 12 Ghana cedis, which is more than triple the cost of a pint in the US. I hadn’t had real ice cream in over two weeks and that Ben and Jerry’s pint looked so appealing, but running low on cedis I controlled my urge.

I heard that this is a fundamentally new shopping experience for Ghanaians. As we browse around, I notice how we and the other obrunis are the majority and how the Ghanaians seem to be walking around and not really purchasing anything. It makes me wonder about the sustainability of the Accra Mall. While there are plenty of shoppers, there isn’t much buying. Without a disposable income or a materialistic culture of consumerism, I wonder if this beautiful, modern mall will turn a profit. On the day of our departure, we sadly say goodbye to Ghana, wishing our stay were much longer. At the same time, we are also eagerly awaiting our return to America where we can return to modern conveniences that we have grown so accustomed.